

**Appropriations Committee
Deficiency Hearing
April 21, 2015
Testimony of
S. Scott Semple, Commissioner
Department of Correction**

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Scott Semple. I am the Commissioner of the Department of Correction and I am here today to speak on our projected deficiency and our appropriations status for the current fiscal year.

Due to the FAC action that transferred funds from personal services to cover our shortfalls in other expenses and workers' compensation accounts, we are currently projecting a net Personal Services deficit of \$4.9 million for fiscal year 2015. We anticipate that a portion of the gross shortfall in our Personal services account to be covered through a transfer from the "Reserve for Salary Adjustment" account, centrally administered by the Office of Policy and Management.

As we have mentioned in past testimony, the Department's expenditures are driven by the level of the supervised inmate population, which dictates the size of our physical plant, staffing levels, utility costs, maintenance expenses, inmate food, clothing, and other supply costs. Staff overtime, the aging of our facilities and the rising cost of utilities, food and other commodities continue to be a source of concern for us.

The Personal Services deficit that we are currently experiencing is being primarily driven by an unusually large number of retirements which have in turn generated larger than anticipated payouts of accumulated leave. As you may know, in the early 1990's, truth in sentencing legislation was a main driver of rapid facility expansions with nine prisons opening between 1990 and 1995. Many hazardous duty staff hired during this expansion are now, or will soon become eligible to retire. As a result DOC is currently experiencing a great deal of turnover that will remain constant through the next two to three years.

We have made significant efforts in reducing staff overtime and some of our efforts, such as tighter scrutiny of the use of sick time and the redistribution of inmates from higher cost confinement to a lower cost confinement have yielded success. Reducing overtime remains a challenge. Our facilities need to maintain defined staffing levels to ensure the safety and security of Connecticut's citizens, DOC staff, and the inmates committed to our care and custody. This high rate of attrition has made it very difficult to keep staffing levels at the amount needed to dramatically impact overtime. Currently vacancies make up approximately 50% of DOC's overtime costs. Despite these challenges I am happy to report that DOC has generated 168,000 fewer overtime hours this fiscal year than last fiscal year for a savings off \$6.7 million over the previous year. We will continue to work diligently to maintain this trend.

We examine all aspects of our business model for opportunities to improve offender outcomes, increase operational efficiencies, reduce costs and improve and enhance safety and security for the citizens of Connecticut. We also remain committed to continuing our primary mission of maintaining a safe, professional, and efficient correctional system. The department is dedicated to honoring the rights of crime victims, and to making sure that high-risk offenders receive proper oversight and interventions as we continue our efforts to reduce recidivism and lower crime. We will continue to strive to improve public safety for the citizens of Connecticut, to ensure a safe environment for staff, and to provide offenders with opportunities to safely reintegrate into their communities as productive members of society.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today, and we would be happy to respond to your questions.